

Myths vs. Facts: FEMA Disaster Assistance

Release Date: Mar 18, 2025

Release Number: FS-022

During disasters, myths about FEMA can spread, which ultimately can discourage survivors from accessing the assistance they may need. The best way to correct misinformation is to get the truth out about FEMA's role in disaster assistance. Below, we address myths to help survivors of the Los Angeles County wildfires distinguish fact from fiction.

Myth: If I have Insurance, FEMA won't be able to offer me assistance.

Fact: FEMA encourages insured survivors to apply. FEMA does not duplicate assistance for damage that is covered by insurance but may cover other losses that insurance does not. If duplication of benefits occurs, you may be required to pay back FEMA assistance. For more information, you can visit: [Am I Eligible for FEMA Assistance if I have Insurance?](#)

Myth: I must add a disclaimer to my fundraising page stating that money raised won't go towards home cleanup or rebuilding.

Fact: In general, crowdfunding proceeds or other gifts do not impact how much funding a survivor will receive from FEMA. For example, FEMA generally would not consider a "help me raise money for my recovery" fundraiser as a duplication of benefits. However, by law, FEMA cannot duplicate benefits a survivor receives from any government program, insurance payout, nonprofit or other source.

If survivors receive money from a fundraiser for a specific disaster-related expense, they will not be able to receive FEMA assistance for the same expense. For example, if a survivor received money via crowdfunding for "hotel costs" and the survivor also requested money from FEMA for hotel costs, FEMA would need to consider the funding received via crowdfunding before processing the assistance for lodging expense reimbursement. If crowdfunding donations duplicate FEMA assistance, a survivor will need to repay their FEMA grant that covered the same expense.



Myth: Accepting FEMA assistance could affect my Social Security benefits, taxes, food stamps or Medicaid.

Fact: FEMA disaster assistance is not a taxable income and does not affect benefits received from other federal programs, such as Social Security, Medicaid, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance.

Myth: There's nothing I can do if FEMA says I'm not eligible for assistance.

Fact: A FEMA determination letter is not necessarily a denial letter. In many cases, FEMA may need more information from the survivor to proceed in the application process. If the survivor disagrees with FEMA's determination, they can always appeal. For information on how to appeal, visit: [How to Appeal a FEMA Decision](#).

Myth: If I disagree with a FEMA decision letter, I can only file an appeal once.

Fact: Every time an applicant receives a determination letter from FEMA, they have the right to appeal. With each appeal letter, the applicant must include new documentation to support their claim and submit it within 60 days of the date on FEMA's letter.

Myth: If I get disaster assistance from FEMA, I will have to pay it back.

Fact: In most cases, the money FEMA provides to disaster survivors are grants which do not have to be repaid. However, FEMA can't duplicate benefits. For example, if a survivor receives an insurance settlement for an expense FEMA will not be able to offer funding for the same expense.

Myth: If I have insurance, I won't qualify for the government debris removal program.

Fact: At the time a survivor opts into the program and completes the required Right of Entry (ROE) form with the county, they will be asked about their insurance status. If they are insured for debris removal, they will be asked to agree to assign debris-removal insurance proceeds to the county and to release a copy of their insurance policy to the county. Federal law prohibits a duplication of benefits, and the program is obligated to ensure that duplications do not occur. For further information about the debris removal program visit Los Angeles County's [Debris Removal website](#).

For further questions, to file an appeal, or to update an application survivors should call 1800-621-3362, visit disasterassistance.gov, or use the [FEMA App](#). Support is available as survivors continue to work through the recovery process.



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